BURNS ALWAYS MAKES PRISONERS CONFESS WHERE HE POSSIBLY CAN

Great Detective Has No Fear of Death and No Mercy on a Liar

IS EASY WITH A "SQUARE" MAN

When a Prisoner Confesses, Burns Does All He Can to Help Him

Every one who knows detective William J. Burns calls him "Billy." That is, every one not being hunted by Mr. Burns does. Billy is a natural sort of name for him, says the New York Globe and Commercial advertiser. William J. only fits him on Sundays and holidays. His round, florid face and his twinkling blue eyes, and his red hair and mustache, and his neatly rounded stomach, and even his hurrying, energetic ways incline one to a friendly familiarity.

Burns is a naturally friendly man. That spirit has made him successful in a score of different occupations. Now and then he has been obliged by the exigencies of his profession to sell life insurance, and he sold more life insurance than do the agents who have been raised in that particular locality all of their lives. If he had been cast to play the part of bartender in life's play he would have been known as the best bartender from coast to coast. Traveling men would have made jumps of miles to get into the town where Billy Burns fractured the excise regulations on Sunday.

Believes in Confessions.

That friendliness of his is one reason why he has always been able to get confessions in the cases on which he works. Burns believes in confessions. No matter how absolutely convincing the evidence against the accused may be, he always likes to put another rivet in it. Now and then he tackles some such proposition as that of Abe Ruef, in San Francisco. The evidence was strong enough against Ruef, but Burns insisted on a confession. Because Ruef confessed, Burns used his influence with the courts to have his sentence held down to a mere five years. Then Ruef repudiated his confession—and drew a sentence of 14 years. With conditions as they were in San Francisco at that time, it is possible that Burns might not have been able to convict him at all, without the confession. Incidentally, Burns did a bit of stage managing which shows a facet of Burns's many angled character. He kept Ruef so nervous and uneasy that he could not sleep at night. Burns showed him that the only way in which he could gain the boon of dreamless sleep was to tell the truth.

How Ruef Talked.

Burns is not merely a magnetic sort of a man, who draws other men to him through that show of friendliness. No detective ever has done what he does because they lack that power of placing themselves in the boots of the suspected man, and looking at the world through frightened eyes. In the Ruef case, for an example, Ruef had been taken from the custody of the chief of police of San Francisco—one of Ruef's creatures—and placed in charge of elisors named by judge Dunn. Burns selected these elisors carefully. They were men he could depend on. Day after day, no matter what other matters he had on hand, he visited Ruef. At first he urged him to confess. When Ruef held out, he stopped talking about the case. He talked of everything else under the sun, until Ruef began to like him. Then he set off his plot.

One of Ruef's guards was a quiet, determined, self-contained man named McCarthy. McCarthy guarded San Francisco's chief crook at night. Night after night McCarthy would stir about in the room, at a certain hour. He never spoke to Ruef, or touched him, but Ruef always awoke.

"Did you call me?" he would ask.

McCarthy would say he had not.

"Did you hear a noise?" Ruef would ask.

The "Third Degree."

McCarthy had made no noise. Night after night Ruef was awakened at the same hour by McCarthy's skilful noises. At last he began to awaken at that hour through custom. Then McCarthy sprung the plot.

"You've been talking in your sleep," he told Ruef.

That interested man demanded that he be told what he had said. McCarthy did not know, except that Ruef had been talking of something connected with the graft cases. Ruef began to worry about it. He began to fear to sleep lest in unconsciousness he commit himself. At this time Ruef's friends—ministers, and those he had known as a boy, and others he felt would give him only good advice—began to call on him, sent by Burns. Each gave him the same advice:

"Confess."

At last Ruef broke down. He could not keep his secret any longer, and one night he sent for Burns and told him all. It was to save his own life, as he believed, that he repudiated the confession. After that Burns had no mercy on him.

There lies the clue to another trait of Burns. When the time comes, he has no mercy. That friendliness that formerly shone through his good-natured blue eyes disappears. They become small and hard and unforgiving. He never threatens the man he is after. He makes that man threaten himself. And when he finally determines that the suspected man will not take the easy way, he demands that the law's limit be imposed upon him. The man who meets him half way finds him willing to lighten the burden. The defiant man only finds him hard, even to the point of cruelty.

Burns was a detective born. His father was once chief of police of Columbus, O. As a youngster, the tally sheet forgeries, a cause celebre in Ohio, attracted his attention. All the best detectives in the west were at work on the case. They detected in the good old fashioned way, which involved a prodigious amount of running about and consumption of raw whisky. Twenty-odd year old Billy Burns thought they were not going about it properly. He so stated to the man in charge.

"You," said the man in charge, "are a little red-headed fool. What do you know about detective work?"

His First Big Case.

So Billy Burns told him. He has a way of sitting up close to his subject when he tells a thing, and resting one hand on the other fellow's knee, and gimleting those small blue eyes into the other fellow's brain, until the other fellow gets uneasy. The man in charge told young Burns to go ahead and do some of his fine-haired detecting if he wanted to. So he did. It was his work that got the convictions in that case, and smeared a scandal over Ohio that will never be forgotten until that generation wears out. When he got through with that case, the government wanted him. He was given a commission in the secret service.

There he just worked his way up. He got small cases at first, and larger cases as he grew. By and by, he became known as Never Quit Burns. He would stay on a case until he died or the other fellow did, if he had to. He never worked eight hours a day, he worked 24 hours. In later years, when he had become the head of a detective agency of his own, he tried to train his men to do the same. Now and then he finds good material. This is a sample of Burns's methods, although worked out by manager Schindler of the New York agency:

It was in the Heideman case in Asbury Park. Heideman has since been electrocuted for the murder of a little girl. But at the time there was no evidence against him. Suspicion alone pointed his way. He was employed by a man who believed his protestations of innocence, and who protected him. The detectives were not permitted on the property. They could get no one near Heideman to "rope" him. So Schindler had recourse to a Burns trick. In the greenhouse where Heideman was employed, and where he slept at night, was a big dog. The greenhouse was surrounded by woods. At midnight every night a detective walked about the greenhouse and aroused the dog. Not much noise was needed. The dog would bark at first—and then, being only a dog and nervous—he would howl. For 10 nights that dog awakened every night and dismally bayed at the moon. Then Heideman's nerves gave away. For 10 nights he had been awakened at midnight, and lying there sleepless in the darkness had thought of his crime. He could not stay there any longer, and when he left the protection of the greenhouse the detectives were on his trail. It was the easiest thing in the world to "rope" him then. The confession followed. Then came the electrocution.

His Wonderful Control.

Another of Burns's striking characteristics is his complete control of his face and voice. On one occasion he wanted to locate a criminal. He traced him to a restaurant, and finally determined that he was working there as a waiter. To gain his confidence—and that confession—he took a job there himself, as waiter. One day an old friend walked in and took a seat at Burns's table. The old friend knew the detective through his disguise of a dirty white apron at once.

"Why, hello, Bill," cried the glad old friend.

"Vot iss?" asked Burns in German dialect.

The old friend told him that he was recognized. Mr. Burns persisted in that German dialect and menial expression of countenance. Finally he shoved the menu under the old friend's nose.

"Vot iss this—kiddink?" he asked. "You vant somedings to eat, misder?"

So the surprised old friend accepted Burns as a regular waiter and probably thought no more of it. A week later Burns got his man—and the confession.

Another somewhat similar incident, but with more startling possibilities, occurred in the Oregon mountains. Burns had been hanging about a little hamlet for several weeks on a job that was sure to prove most unpopular with its inhabitants. In point of fact, they had lynched Burns's predecessor, as a hint that they did not want to be bothered by fly cops any more. Burns was sitting in front of the village saloon one sunny day, when a bunch of cowpunchers rode up. One walked up, spurs a-jingle.

"Well, well!" said the owner of the hat. "Don't this beat time! My old friend, Billy Burns."

It was a boy he had been reared with. They had attended the same parochial school in Columbus, Ohio. They had fought each other and courted the same little, pig-tailed girls.

"Well there was a fine kettle of fish. The last detective they had hung in that village wasn't properly dead yet. But Burns met the cowboys happily, laughed over the odd resemblance made a part of the evening's fun, and finally bade them goodby. The next day he and his partner rode up 40 miles into the mountains, on the country stage, and arrested their man. They were coming back with him manacled between them—and their revolvers loose in their scabbards—when they met the old Columbus chum again.

Carries Revolver.

"He never goes without a revolver," said one of the men who know him well. "His life has been threatened so often—and by desperate and dangerous men—that he hardly pays any attention to a fresh threat. But he does not take a needless chance. If they ever 'get' Billy Burns it will be from behind, for he isn't safe game when he is approached in front. The one thing he will not do is to carry a bodyguard. No matter where he goes, or how great the danger might be, he will not have a bodyguard along. That, he holds, would be cowardice. And there isn't a drop of cowardly blood in Burns's body. That was shown the day that he arrested Ulrich's partner in Boston. He had been watching Ulrich, the old counterfeiter, for weeks. Finally, he knew that he could only get his partner through the general delivery window of the postoffice. When the counterfeiter came to ask for his mail, Burns placed him under arrest, and then searched him for a revolver. But he did not search thoroughly. The pair walked out into the street, on the way to prison. Right around the corner the counterfeiter stopped.

Didn't Dare Shoot.

"Now," said he, "I've got you, Billy Burns."

He had produced a revolver from a scabbard, hidden under his coat. The muzzle was jammed into Burns's stomach so tightly that it left a black and blue mark. Burns could hardly breathe.

"I'll not be bothered by you again," said the crook.

"You dare not shoot," said Burns, who had put up his hands when he was told to. He isn't fool enough to disregard the orders of the man who has the "drop."

The crook did not dare shoot, either. But he stood off the gathering crowd, dashed around a corner and got away. He sent word to Burns that he would kill that detective on sight. The next time he saw Burns was when Burns rearrested him. Not long ago he was released from the penitentiary to which he had been sentenced, and at once sent another message to Burns.

"I'll never rest until I kill you," said he. "That is the one thing in life that I am living for."

"If I paid any attention to that sort of things I'd have to go out of the detective business," said he. "I wouldn't have time to do anything but shiver."

When he was first put to work on the Oregon land frauds—United States senator Mitchell afterward died while in jail because of the part he played in them—he got enough evidence to make it certain that a United States senator and other prominent men were implicated in the case. He went to secretary of the interior Ethan Hitchcock with this statement.

Roused the Secretary.

"I haven't evidence enough to dare state the senator's name," said he.

Hitchcock bounded out of his chair. "You are a fool and a liar," he declared. "You dare not stand there and tell me again that a United States senator is engaged in these dirty frauds. I will have you discharged from the government service for making such charges."

Hitchcock fairly raved. He denounced Burns more bitterly, it is said, than anyone else has ever dared to his face. Burns got a bit pale as he listened, but he is a disciplined man.

"I'll come back with the name of that United States senator, and the proof of all I say," said he.

His task wasn't easy. He was taken off the job once, but Francis Heney, who was the prosecuting officer, made such an ungentlemanly row about it that he was put back again. When he got through with that case he had smashed the most dangerous land ring known in the history of the west. A dozen great reputations were smirched by the exposure. He was given the alternative of riches if he would quit, and death if he wouldn't.

"You haven't got a man in Oregon," laughed Burns, "who can kill me—or hand me money."

He put it a bit differently when he was released from the government service to help Francis J. Heney clean house in San Francisco. By and by he got things and men about where he wanted them. The men knew it. He had proofs and confessions. One day a man came to him.

"I have a job for you to do in the east," said he. "It's worth $100,000, cash down, to you, if you'll quit this persecution of innocent men here and return to the east."

"And quit this job?" asked Burns. The other man nodded. Burns thrust his fiery red face right up against that of the other.

"You go back to who sent you," said he, "and tell them to go to hell."

No Bribe for Him.

The proposition was repeated in a different way a little later. One of the principal officers of a great railroad system sent for Burns.

"We wish to reorganize our detective service in the east," said he. "We like the way you do things. I'll pay you $100,000 if you'll take charge of our detective organization—and pay it to you now."

"And go away from San Francisco now?" asked Burns.

"Of course," said the great railroad man, "you would be subject to our orders."

"Nothing doing," said Burns.

They had tried frightening him with the threat of death, and had not succeeded, and they had tried bribing him, and they could not put that over.

DETECTIVE WILLIAM J. BURNS.